

TESTS ON HARDWARE

SOFTWARE DIRECTORY

VIDEO

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The Magazine Of Home Video

THE VIDEO
SCREEN:
NEW ARTISTS'
CANVAS

HOW TO
PUT THE
"HOME"
IN HOME
VIDEO

- SHOP-AT-HOME
SOFTWARE GUIDE
- DECORATING IDEAS
- NEW PRODUCTS
& ACCESSORIES
- YOUR TECHNICAL
QUESTIONS
ANSWERED

VideoTests On:
TOSHIBA & QUASAR VCRs
AKAI B/W CAMERA
ATARI VIDEO COMPUTER
G.E. WIDESCREEN 1000
JVC MINI-TV COMBO
WHISTLESWITCH



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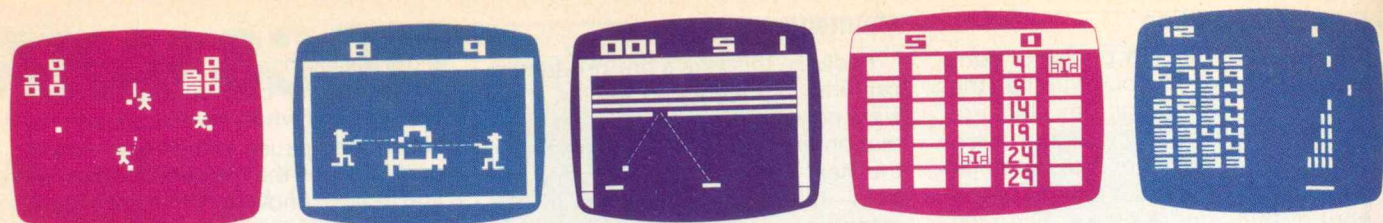
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THE ATARI Video Computer programmable game system is among the most comprehensive on the market today in terms of the number and variety of games offered.

At the present time, the Atari library has twenty game cartridges containing more than 1300 game variations, and the firm plans to add more on a regular basis.

The Video Computer console measures 23½ x 4½ x 13 inches (h/w/d) and weighs 6¾ pounds. The suggested retail price is \$199.95, which includes the Combat game program cartridge, two joystick controllers, two paddle controllers, AC adaptor, and TV/Game switch box. Also available is a new keyboard controller (unavailable to us at the time we did our testing) and several new cartridges that are played with the new accessory. The retail price for the keyboard controller is \$19.95. The retail price for Atari cartridges is also \$19.95 except for the Indy 500 game, which comes with its own special steering controller and retails for \$39.95.

Testing Procedure

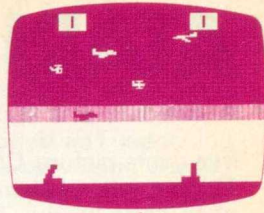
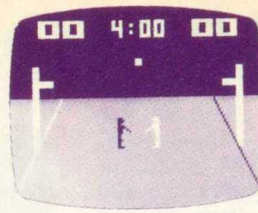
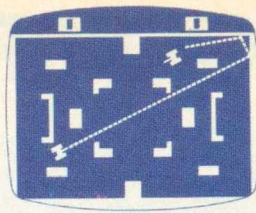
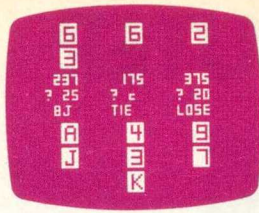
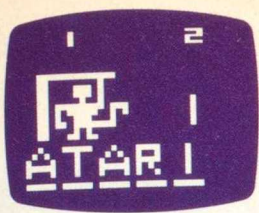
We received a console (serial number 24864J), paddle and joystick controllers, and a good selection of game program cartridges direct from Atari. Testing was conducted by the Editor and Technical Editor in the Editor's home in August 1978. The games were displayed and played on a 17-inch Sony Trinitron Model KV-1724.

Overall Performance

The Atari Video Computer can be used with any TV, color or black and white (though color is eminently preferable) as well as large-screen projection TVs. If you're connected to an outside cable-TV system, as we were, you may have to disconnect the cable in order to get an interference-



ATARI VIDEO



COMPUTER

ATARI VIDEO COMPUTER

free game picture. Coaxial cables are 75 ohm while video games use 300 ohm; although our Trinitron has an antenna switch that could convert to either, we did not get a clear picture until we completely disconnected the 75 ohm cable.

Once over that hurdle, we had no more problems.

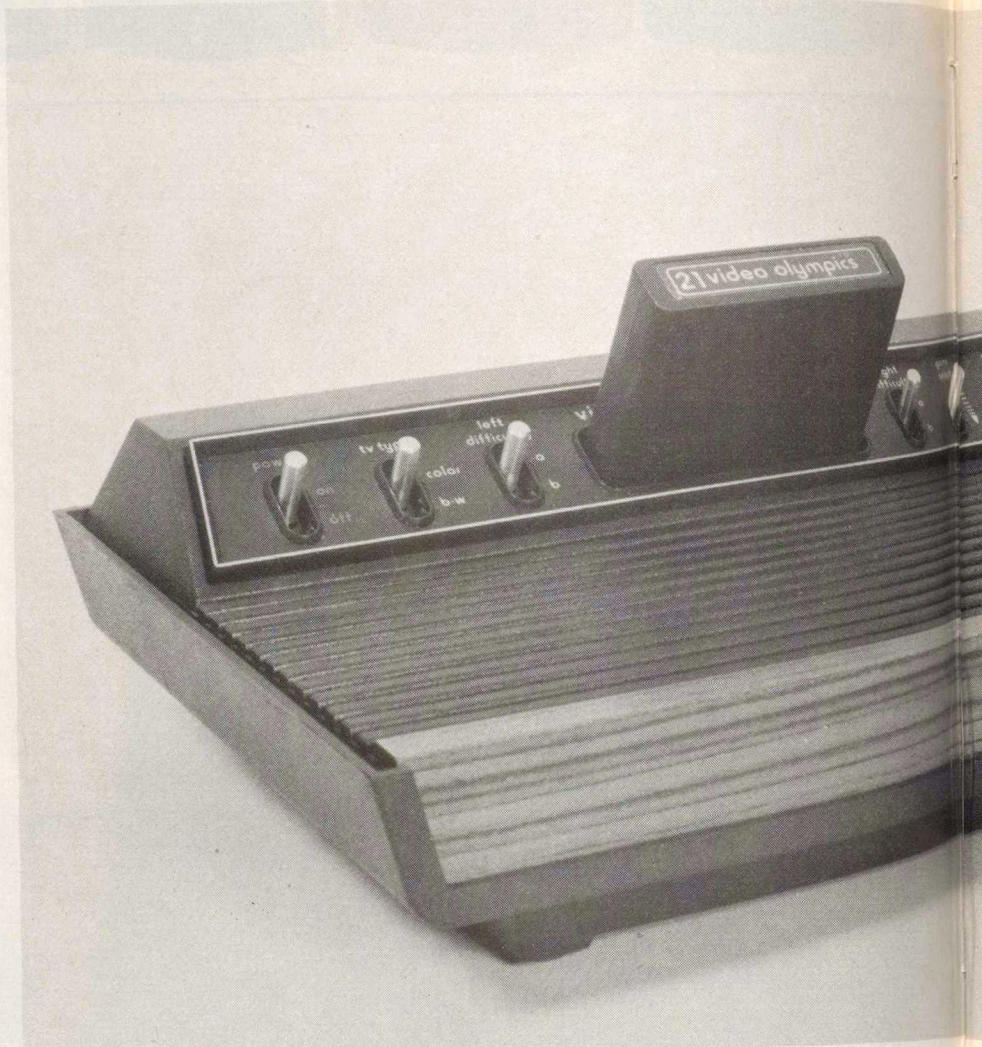
Picture Quality

We liked the quality of the Atari game pictures. The background colors were brilliant, clear, and so varied we gave up trying to count them. Images and figures were clean and sharp for the most part. Sometimes, in fact, what we saw on screen seemed more like a graphic presentation than simply a game. And most important, we feel, the colors, images, and sound effects coincided so that they enhanced one another.

Audio Quality

When we tested the original Fairchild Channel F programmable game (VideoTest #1, Summer 1978 VIDEO), we noted that the sound effects came from the game console. In the Atari system (and in the new System II version of the Channel F, incidentally), the sound effects come from the TV, which not only makes for a richer sound in general but allows for player control of the volume to suit personal preference.

The Atari unit offers a tremendous variety of sound effects—from



THE GAMES

Atari's program cartridges are chock-full of games—some may have as many as 50 variations. Each game has a number that corresponds to the number in the instruction booklet that comes with each cartridge. To choose a game to play, you run through the cartridge by activating the Game Select switch; each game's number will appear on screen, and when you reach the one you want to play you stop. All games end in 2 minutes, 16 seconds.

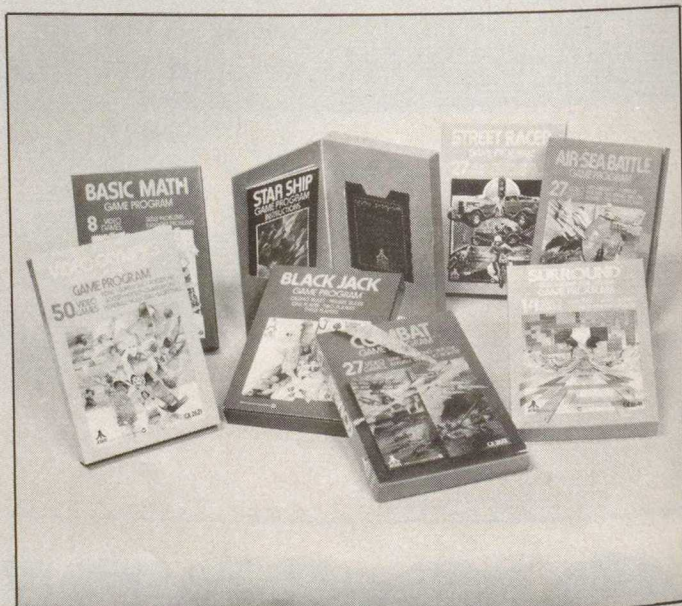
We received the following games from Atari for test purposes. Although it's difficult to make a sweeping judgment about a game (some people will love what others find a deadly bore), we've attempted to rate them according to their level of interest for adults, and we recognize that children might have other ideas.

In any event, you'll get an idea of what games are available and what they're like.

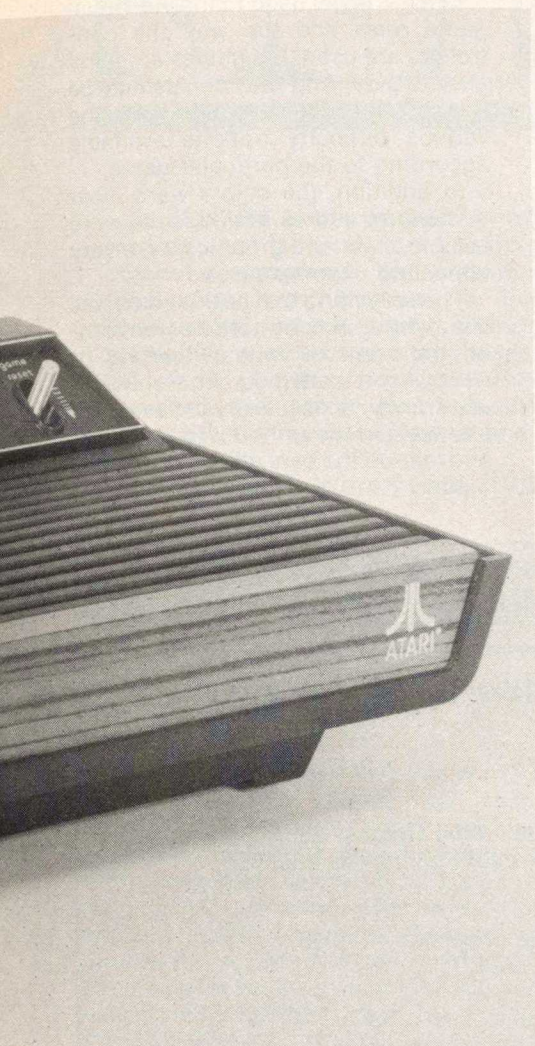
COMBAT

Games 1-5 are tank games for two players. As you move up in number they get more complex, and the sounds are very good...Rated 6

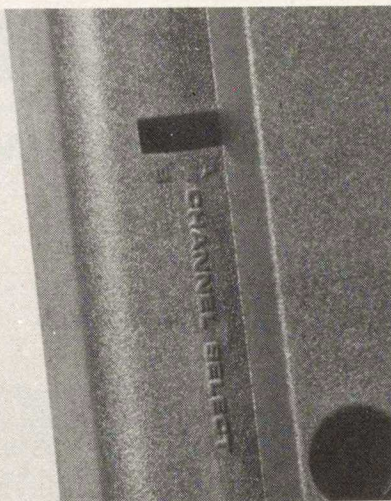
Games 6-0 are tank/pong games. The hitch here is that after you make a hit your position changes so you can't hit again...Rated 7½



Atari's game cartridges are colorfully packaged, and each comes with full instructions.



The Video Computer's operational controls are located on the front of the console. In back are the plugs for the hand controllers and power cord, and on the bottom is the channel 3/4 select switch.



realistic explosions and machine-gun fire to card shuffling and quick musical tunes. At all times, the sound effects matched what was happening on the screen, which made playing the games exciting and all the more fun.

Since the sound on the Atari system goes through the TV, you can loop out of your set to your stereo. You won't get stereo sound, of course, but since the audio quality of the Atari is good to begin with it can only get better when heard from two speakers.

Ease of Operation

With the exception of the plugs for the game controllers, all the operational controls for the Atari Video Computer are located across the top of the console and are clearly marked. They couldn't be easier to use; they're all simple switches that are either moved to one of two positions or depressed and released, depending on their function.

Two types of hand controllers come with the Atari unit—paddle controllers, used primarily with the ball games, and joystick controllers, used primarily with the action games. Both are very easy to operate—the knob on the paddles controller is turned left and right; the joystick is moved forward, back, left, right, etc.—and both have a red button that's pushed to perform a particular function depending on the game being played. For this reason, we recommend taking a few minutes to study the instructions that come with each program cartridge. It's no fun—and it's very frustrating—to see things happening

Games 10-11 are invisible tank games. Hard to get used to but interesting. . .Rated 6½

Games 12-14 are invisible tank/pong games. Each of these gets more complex. . .Rated 7½

Games 15-18 are bi-plane games. Not so different from the previous lot. . .Rated 6

Games 19-20 are more bi-plane games, at supposedly faster levels. . .Rated 6

Games 21-27 are jet-fighter games. Pretty much more of the same with different playing pieces. . .Rated 6

BLACKJACK

A good game for adults with several variations for single or double players. While you're waiting to play you can hear the computer shuffle and deal. Pick your rules, place your bets, and hope for the best. . .Rated 10

BASIC MATH

Very basic addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division. A little tune announces whether the answer is right or wrong. In our opinion, the controls of this game may be a little more complicated than the actual problems. . .Rated 5

SURROUND

Games 1-12 are variations of the basic Surround game, in which two players try to draw lines without touching or crossing another line and without going back over a line. The sound effects are loud and fast to keep you on your toes. It can get very complex and challenging. . .Rated 9

Games 13-14 are doodle games, fine as a substitute for Soitaire but basically pretty dull. . .Rated 5

VIDEO OLYMPICS

The 50 games and game variations in this cartridge include Pong, Super Pong, Foozpong, Quadrapong, soccer, hockey, handball, basketball, and volleyball from one to four players. They're the old standbys but they're still lots of fun. Especially challenging is volleyball. . .Rated 8½

STREET RACER

Consists of 27 dodge-em and drive-em type games for from one to four players. . .Rated 5½

STARSHIP

Has 17 games that look nice but are hard to get a handle on. . .Rated 4



What you need to play the games: a program cartridge, an AC adaptor, and an antenna switch box.

on the screen and not be able to do anything about them.

There are also difficulty switches (one for the player on the right, one for the left) that can be used for handicapping or simply making the games tougher and more challenging. Generally, position A is more difficult than position B.

One operational feature of the Atari unit was quite annoying to us. According to the instruction manual, the unit should be turned off when inserting or removing a cartridge; but then a loud, unpleasant noise comes from the TV because it's then set on and broadcasting an unused channel. The only remedy is turning the TV volume down and up again each time—rather an inconvenience, we feel.

Maintenance

Atari offers a 90-day parts and labor warranty on the Video Computer. After the 90-day period, the unit must be shipped, postage paid, to Atari for servicing. A check for a basic fee described on the warranty card must accompany each service order.

In order to prolong the life of the game, Atari recommends that the unit be turned off before inserting or removing a game cartridge, that a game cartridge not be forced into the console, that no AC adaptor other than the one designed for the Atari system and supplied with it be used, and that the console and controllers be handled carefully—don't lift them by the wires.

Conclusion

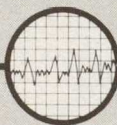
Atari's array of games and game variations is rather impressive, as are

the accompanying game-playing sounds. With so much to choose from, there's bound to be something for everyone—from the kiddies to the most blasé of adults.

Once you get used to the individual game rules and the way the controllers are used, the games are fairly easy to play. And they can usually be pepped up considerably with the various difficulty options available according to the particular game.

In addition, the colors were clear and sharp, scores and legends were easy to read, and graphics were very appealing in some cases.

The only thing that bothered us was the awful sound we got when we turned the unit off when inserting or removing a cartridge. The shut-off, apparently, is necessary to save wear and tear on the unit, but saving wear and tear on the ears might be another matter. □□□



VideoTest Report number 18

Atari Video Computer System

DATA

Date of test: August 1978

Suggested retail price: \$199.95 (including Combat game cartridge, 2 joystick controllers, 2 paddle controllers, AC adaptor, TV/Game switch box)

Accessories:

Video Computer System game programs—\$19.95

Indy 500 game program—\$39.95

Keyboard controller—\$19.95

Function: programmable video game

Operational requirements: TV set, preferably color

Dimensions:

4½ inches (height)

23½ inches (width)

14 inches (depth)

Weight: 6¾ pounds

Casing: plastic

Controls: power on/off, color/black-and-white TV selector, right and left difficulty switches, Game Select, Game Reset

Color variations: complete color spectrum

Hi-fi output: no

Earphone jack: no

Warranty: 90 days

Games available: Indy 500, Video Olympics, Starship, Street Racer, Surround, Blackjack, Basic Math, Air-Sea Battle, Space War, Home Run, Outlaw, Breakout, Hunt & Score, Codebreaker, Hangman, Football, Basketball, Flag Capture, Brain Games, Slot Racers

TEST RESULTS AND RATINGS

Overall picture quality: very good

Computer figures: good

Computer scoring and legends: very good

Overall audio quality: excellent

Ease of operation: very good

Energy consumption: 9 volts

Overall performance: very good